

Sermon – 07/07/19

Text – Galatians 6:1-10, 14-18

Theme – “God Is Not Mocked”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“God is not mocked,” says St. Paul. “Oh, but He *is*,” you answer. He is mocked all the time. Mocked by adherents of other religions. Mocked by those who deny His existence. Mocked by TV and movie writers, who think they are so clever and funny. Mocked by our society that has no need for God, preferring to see Him as an outdated relic of the past. Mocked by many modern scientists and scholars and experts, who claim to have all the answers.

Of course, God is mocked. We see and hear it all the time. However, the worst mockers of God are really often not those that I have just mentioned, but rather you and me. Christians. Those who claim to be His children and followers. For the sad truth is that we also mock God. Oh, maybe not in as open and brazen a fashion as do these others. But we DO mock Him in our own ways.

We mock Him by our sin — particularly our habitual and pet sins. We mock Him when we excuse sin – our own sins, but also that of our loved ones. We mock Him by our loving and trusting in other gods – those idols that we have set up in our hearts. We mock Him by neglecting worship and prayers and devotions. We mock Him by making our faith a “Sunday only” kind of thing. We mock Him by our lack of love for others – the very ones that *He* loves so much that He suffered and died for them. Yes, the truth is that we DO mock God, and in *many* ways.

And so **WE** need to hear what St. Paul is saying in our text today. Not just those “out there” who laugh at God, who deny God, who ignore God – but US. We are the chief of sinners. And we need to admit it. So, let’s take a look at what St. Paul – what *God* – is saying to us today.

He begins:

*Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load.*

Cain asked God if he was his brother’s keeper. Well, the answer is yes! We are called to love one another. And part of that love is to care about the spiritual welfare of others. So, if we know someone is caught in some sin, we are to **act**. Not ignore it. Not pretend that it is none of our business. Not say that it is between that person and God. No, we are members of the same body of Christ, and so what affects one member or part affects all.

Paul here tells us that we are to go to our brother (or sister) and gently apply the Law. Show him his sin. Remind him of the dangers associated with sin – dangers that can even lead to the loss of faith, a hardened heart, and eventually damnation. But note that Paul says we are to do this “*in a spirit of gentleness*”. That is hard. After all, the Law is the hammer of God and it HURTS when it comes crashing down. So, we are not to wield it carelessly, or make it any harder and more painful than it already is. Remember, we too are sinners. And so we do not go in with a smug, self-righteous, superior attitude, but we remember “but for the grace of God, there go I”.

Christ’s compassion and love is to be found (and heard) in us. And how did Jesus treat sinners and the lost? Did He look down on them? Upbraid them? Constantly remind them of their failures? No, once the Law had done its job – once they recognized their sin – He was quick to forgive. To restore. To bind up and make alive by the Gospel. And so shall we. Just as we confess our sins here in church

for the sake of receiving the absolution, so it is with our dealing with a fallen brother. Not to make him wallow in guilt, but to lift him up again as God's forgiven child in Christ: to tell him he is forgiven all in Christ AND (maybe more difficult) to treat him as such.

Paul goes on to tell us to be aware, lest we also fall. That could mean falling into the same sin as that of our brother. Or it might mean the sin of pride, of self-righteousness, of sanctimonious hypocrisy. The first confession of sin always needs to be our own. The first forgiveness needs to be for OUR sin. Then, and only then, can we come to our brother about *his* sin.

Paul continues:

*Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

“*Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches.*” That just might be one of my favorite verses in all of the Bible! Seriously, though, think of the blessings God has given us through those who have taught us the faith: parents and grandparents, Sunday School and VBS teachers, pastors and others. What they have given us is far beyond repayment, for they have shown us our Savior. And so we should do all we can to show our thanks – to them, but especially to God who sent them to us.

And what have they taught us? That though we are truly sinful and unclean, truly deserving God's wrath and condemnation, instead we received full and free forgiveness in Christ. That Jesus has done EVERYTHING for our salvation: He lived for us (keeping the commandments); He died for us (paying for our sin); He rose for us (opening heaven to all those who trust in Him); He ascended into heaven for us (to rule all things for our welfare and blessing); He will return at the end of time (to take us to be with Him forever).

The question is: what do we do with that teaching? Sadly (as Paul says) some mock God by taking that Gospel of forgiveness and turning it into license for sin. In its most coarse form, we see that when people deny sin as being sin. Taking what God has forbidden and condemned, and making it permissible. “Oh, God *couldn't* have meant **that!**” But, if He didn't, then why did He say it? No, sin is sin, whether we like it or not. Whether we agree or not. Whether it makes sense to us or not.

But God is mocked here too when we intentionally sin, figuring that we can just ask for forgiveness later. So, we plunge ahead and do what we know to be wrong, banking on God's grace and mercy. But the danger! To tempt and try the Holy Spirit like that! To “*sow to the flesh*” as St. Paul puts it, and then expect God to bail us out afterward. And yet, we have all done it, haven't we? We lie, we cheat, we get drunk, we do all sorts of things we know are offensive to God, all the while planning on “repenting” later. But is that really repentance, since we intended/planned to sin first?

No, as Paul says, that is NOT how a Christian lives. Rather than indulging our flesh (that is, our sinful nature) we want to encourage and nurture the life which the Holy Spirit has planted in us. Last week in our Epistle lesson, we heard of that fruit of the Spirit: “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...*” That is what we want to see in our hearts and lives. And the only way for that to happen is for the Spirit to be active in us. And He is, through the Gospel. And that Gospel is given/applied to us in Word and Sacrament: in hearing and reading and studying the Word; in daily remembering of our baptism; in receiving the absolution from Christ, as He speaks to us through other Christians; in regular and faithful reception of His Body and Blood in the Lord's Supper.

As we drink in that Gospel, we will find that we do NOT grow weary of doing good. That we will see — and take advantage of — opportunities to share Christ's love by word and deed. That the joy

in desires and works of the flesh decreases and fades, while our delight in doing our Father's will increases.

And then, Paul closes his letter with these words:

But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

We Christians are to boast only in Christ. Only in our Father's love. Only in the Spirit's work in us. But, if you are like me, you find yourself sometimes boasting and bragging about yourself. Let's face it, we all are infected with Pharisaical tendencies. We all want to think we are pretty good – at least better than most. We all want to pat ourselves on the back; maybe we even expect God to do so too.

However, whenever we give in to such temptations – whenever we boast of anything BUT Christ for us – we are mocking God. We are standing His grace on its head and pretending that in some measure we deserve all this from Him. No, our works and obedience, our goodness and holiness, our *anything* is NOT enough. Never is and never can be. Instead it is Jesus, Jesus, only Jesus. And to say or think otherwise is to mock the Lord.

But when we exalt and boast of Christ – of the Father's love – of the Spirit's work – when we do THAT then we are not mocking God, but rightly and truly praising Him. When we tell others what God has done – for us AND for them – then we are showing proper gratitude. And proper love – for that grace in Christ Jesus is meant for all people, not just us.

But to trust always and only in Christ, to exalt and praise Him, to witness and testify to His life/death/resurrection is to invite trouble. Trouble from the world. Trouble from the devil. Trouble from those under his thumb and control. And so it is that Paul talks about bearing in his body the "*marks of Jesus*". By that he means the same thing as did Jesus when He spoke of Christians taking up their own crosses to follow Him. That is, there is a cost to discipleship. A great cost. It involves hatred from the world and unbelievers. But while the cost is great, the reward is infinite.

In Christ we have forgiveness. We have pardon and peace. We have reconciliation with God. We have a place in His family. We have eternal life. And what can compare with that? So, we will NOT mock God, but we will instead endure the mocking from the world. As it laughed at our Lord, so it will laugh at us. But so be it.

"*God is not mocked.*" No, He knows what is in the heart. Apart from Christ, that is only evil, wickedness, vile and disgusting sin. But remember, we are NOT apart from Christ; we are forever joined to Him. He has taken our sin to the cross and paid for it all. And in its place He has given us His own perfection, His own righteousness, His own holiness. And so instead of mocking God by our sin, we now praise Him as we share His love by our words and deeds. Words and deeds which reflect His Gospel of salvation and life. In Christ Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.